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Lev Shestov's philosophic solitude and his influence on the European philosophy of the XX century

Lev Shestov (1866 – 1938) is one of those few thinkers whose views do not fit any existing philosophic systems. Generally he objected to any system: when he criticized and dissociated from Solovyov theory of religious philosophy, then he dramatically departed from D.Merezhkovsky school, criticized philosophic positions of N.Berdyayev, disagreed with E.Husserl, argued with M.Buber. L.Shestov's paradoxical speeches as though don't get at all to the course of the Russian philosophical tradition and seem a voice of the single which can't be conformable to any chorus – neither Slavophiles, nor Westerners, metaphysicists, gnoseologists, theologians. On a deep belief of the Russian thinker system as itself kills free creativity, putting it in advance prepared close borders.

Shestov's idea about the individual truth got in absolute solitude was one of the basic moments of the "polyphonic" esthetics which has played an important role in development of the western art of the XXth century. In "Sola fide" Shestov finally separates the internal human life alien to any norms, from truth announced by it. Shestov insists on the view that the person incapable to transfer to "others" the truth learned by him without notable losses. The truth itself is lost in the course of transfer. Therefore the solitude which is deeper than anything underground and at the bottom sea is the beginning and the main condition of approach to the last secret, the last truth born in the deepest solitude.

In this context the Russian thinker's idea of a resolute breaking with "others", his immersion into solitude as the only true environment for research of essence and way sources to rescue has become the fatal step from our point of view. And, as the real wanderer, the truth hunter, in his ascension on tops of knowledge Shestov was alone. He needn't any fellow travelers as "after all they won't help, they only will slow down business". As a result "the tragedy philosophy" alienates L.Shestov from real problems of modern to him cultures and leads him to direct confrontation with it. But for such person as Shestov it is even better. "Because mountain ways as any Alpine conductor will tell you are only for those who aren't subject to dizziness: nur für Schwindelfreie".

Lev Shestov's works reveal the actual criticism of classical metaphysics, but no metaphysicist of traditional sense recognizes Shestov's composition as a little well-founded metaphysics.

Deeply entering into the world of the European metaphysical thought, L.Shestov, in fact, isn't built into it. He transforms its energy and a matter into existential energy and creates his own genre of philosophizing. In the context of his works any quote acquires special, often far from initial sense. And in the context of philosophizing genre Shestov also stays in a condition of deep solitude as it is rather difficult to define it unambiguously. May Shestov's philosophy be regarded to as genre of existential philosophy? He can sometimes agree with such definition. However in all Shestov's works we won't find any "categories" or "existentials", any tendency to any support on concepts: "will", "existence", "consciousness", "life" - nothing interrupts his never-ending inquiring.

Is it probably religious philosophy then? But then there is absolutely reasonable question, what confession his reflections are connected with? Of course, we can agree with thought of G. Fyodorov who in this context spoke about "the Judeo-reformatory line of Christianity"¹, however then Tertullian, Augustine as well as Pascal we'll have to be involved here that can be rather difficult². Actually Shestov shared with religious thinkers only general, so-called "presentiments", the common enthusiasm with the last questions, but their ways regarding sense and the contents were different as far as philosophy was concerned.

Since the 30th years of the XX century Lev Shestov's philosophical ideas finally enter the context of philosophical culture. The creative and friendly relations connected L.Shestov not only with the Russian thinkers who shared with him the bread of affliction in emigration. He was closely connected with philosophers already known in Europe E.Husserl, M.Buber. M., M. Heidegger, K.Bart. Shestov's ideas find their reflection in the French existentialism.

L.Shestov's book "Kierkegaard and existential philosophy" published in Paris after author's death in 1939 authorizes the definition of his philosophizing type as existential³. His philosophy is generally adopted in this environment. Young then **Albert Camus** (1913 – 1960)

¹ Федоров Г.П. Л.Шестов. На весах Иова // Числа. Сб. под ред. И.В. де Марциали и Н.А.Оцуца. – кн. 2 – 3. – 1930. – с. 259

² Ахутин А.В. О втором измерении мышления: Лев Шестов и философия // Ахутин А.В. Поворотные времена. – С.-Пб.: Наука, 2005. – с. 484 – 485

³ Ахутин А.В. Одинокий мыслитель // Шестов Л. Сочинения в 2-х томах. – М.: Наука, 1993. – с.13

resolutely rank L.Shestov among such thinkers as S. Kierkegaard, M. Sheler, M. Heidegger, K.Yaspers. Working over the "The myth about Sisyphus" A.Camus sorts Shestov's views as an indicative example. He pays attention to the fact that even the most closed system, the most closed universal rationalism can always stumble about human thinking irrationality. All those evidence and the most negligible contradictions depreciating intelligence do not escape from him. Both in the history of human heart and in the history of Camus's spirit he recognizes in Shestov only a prevalence of the person's riot against inevitability. He refuses sense to the grounds, he won't get moving unless he is in the middle of the faded desert with fossilized authenticities¹.

Reflecting over Shestov's ideas, Camus focuses attention to the fact that when Shestov opposes absurdity to ordinary morality and reason, he calls it truth and expiation².

For Camus Lev Shestov is a contradictory figure. He agrees with his conclusions about reason vanity, noting that nature laws are significant within known limits and when beyond they turn against themselves and generate absurdity. In the descriptive plan, despite assessment of truth as explanations, they also are quite lawful. Shestov sacrifices all this to irrationalism³.

But Camus doesn't accept that main way which Shestov and the teacher of youth F.Dostoevsky offered. Appealing to God, seriously promising the Kingdom of Heaven and immortality of soul, Shestov artificially removes that tension he so skillfully erected. And then it becomes clear that it is not the absurd writer in front of us but the person who puts an absurdity problem in his works.

It is necessary to point to that fact that Lev Shestov initially occupies a foreground in the French philosophical environment. It happens so generally thanks to his works publishing in three most important French magazines "La Nouvelle Revue Française", "Le Mercure de France" and "La Revue Philosophique". Besides Shestov has the strong close friendship with Lévy-Bruhl who supported and published Shestov's articles up to the death of the Russian thinker.

In the West Shestov's activity as an emigrant comprises three directions simultaneously:

- he suggests foreigners to get acquainted with creativity of the Russian writers and thinkers closer;

¹ Камю А. Миф о Сизифе // Камю А. Бунтующий человек. – М.: изд-во «Политическая литература», 1990. – с. 36 – 37

² Там же. – с. 42

³ Там же. – с. 43

- goes in for criticism of philosophical systems of the past and the present;
- thanks to this L.Shestov offers philosophical community his own views which are very spiritually modern ¹.

Many French thinkers of the first half of the XXth century address to Lev Shestov's creative heritage. Each of them finds something personal in Shestov works. Rakhil Beshpalova, was the family friend of Shestovs for a long time and often called herself his apprentice, analyzes Shestov's views in the essay "Chemins et Carrefours" ("Ways and intersections"). She notes only one line of philosophizing in Shestov, that one which occupies her most of all– continuous fight of the philosopher against so-called scientific philosophy which is based on aprioristic concepts. In general imposing Shestov, R. Beshpalova comes to a conclusion that Shestov's type of the philosopher gradually gravitates to transformation into the executioner of cognition². In this essay Beshpalova compares Shestov with F.Nietzsche, considering that this comparison should be pleasant for the Russian philosopher. But after detailed acquaintance with the manuscript L.Shestov remained dissatisfied with the work.

Shestov strongly influences **Yves Bonnefoy** creativity (1923) who as though joins the essence of range of problems affected by Shestov. He continues Shestov in his own way when says that the real tragedy of the person is that he doesn't believe that the faith can move mountains and therefore the person has to lean on ghosts of mind all the time³.

Shestov was considered to be the teacher and the instructor also for the known playwright **Eugène Ionesco** (1909 – 1994), the representative of French "absurdity theater". E.Ionesco as well as A.Camus finds echoes of absurdity subject in L.Shestov. He considers that Shestov is the very person who can help society to find again the lost center, can help to face tragic revelations, the problem of our final and unsolved purposes as well as the problem of our metaphysical position⁴.

It is impossible to ignore the subject which is actively investigated nowadays in France concerning the influence of Lev Shestov's ideas on formation of the French philosopher **Georges Bataille** (1897 – 1962). Since 1923 and for 1925 L.Shestov was a some kind of

¹ Маркадэ Ж.-К. Проникновение русской мысли во французскую среду. Н.А.Бердяев и Л.И.Шестов // Русская религиозно-философская мысль XX века. Сб. статей под ред. Н.П.Полторацкого. – Питтсбург, 1975. – с. 157

² Beshpaloff R. Chemins et Carrefours. – Paris, 1938. – p. 191

³ Маркадэ Ж.-К. Ук.соч. – с. 152

⁴ Ionesco E. Chestov nous ramene à l'essentiel. – Le Monde, 1967, 18 mai

instructor for the young, beginning writer G.Bataille and helped him to master philosophical literature, influencing thereby his formation as uncommon thinker. Results of this communication are traced at Bataille and after their divergence caused by excessive enthusiasm of the Frenchman for the Marxism theory.

G.Bataille is the successor of Lev Shestov's thought direction to certain extent. Though G.Bataille didn't completely realize Shestov's ideas influence on him. So, for example, Bataille didn't mention L.Shestov's surname either in the list of references to his "The religion theory" or in the list of authors affected author's position formation. Though we can allocate some general aspects. It concerns the development of the morality and mind concept which is opposed to divine and belongs to profane order in Bataille as well as Shestov. As sacral for Bataille, so God for Shestov is out of reason and ethics. And Shestov points to non most mercifulness of God due to his jealousy and capriciousness.

The motive of "double sight" was common for both thinkers, Shestov connected it with the appearance of a certain literary gift which is notable for clear consciousness of life associativity with constant feeling of death. This motive unites two writers both on psychological and thematic levels. There is no doubt that G.Bataille was familiar with L.Shestov's work "Death revelation" where the parable about the death angel with his body entirely covered with eyes is stated. It will be absolutely really to suggest that these motives were a basis of Bataille's "Eye's history" published in 1928¹.

To resume the life and Lev Shestov's works in emigration in France, it should be noted that fact that there were no his direct followers despite his popularity. His influence on philosophical basis formation of the whole French intellectuals generation of the middle of the XX century will be indisputable, but this influence nevertheless was diffuse².

However it is impossible to limit the authority of Lev Shestov's thought to French intellectual environment exclusively. And in the context of the designated subject it is necessary to pay attention to some important points more. First of all, it is important to define possible receptive factors in the German philosophical environment of the middle of the XX century as well.

¹ Морандо К. «Шестов и Батай»: согласие на философию трагедии // Историко-философский ежегодник – 2003. – М.: Наука, 2003 – 2004. – С. 353 – 364

² Маркадэ Ж.-К. Проникновение русской мысли во французскую среду. Н.А.Бердяев и Л.И.Шестов // Русская религиозно-философская мысль XX века. Сб. статей под ред. Н.П.Полторацкого. – Питтсбург, 1975. – с. 160

Firstly as it seems to us it concerns the views of the German thinker **Martin Heidegger** (1889 – 1976). Acquaintance of these philosophers took place only in 1928 at Edmund Husserl. Philosophers of course regarded differently many subjects but it isn't surprising. They developed the same S.Kierkegaard's ideas diversely. Shestov agreed with the subject of the Danish thinker that the reason of "God abandonment" of the person is the fear before Nothing, however he considers that the person is capable to overcome such a fear, having released from Nothing, to become free through the unification with God. Heidegger pays much attention to feeling of despairs in Kierkegaard. And when he finds out that horror is the ground of despair, he believes that Nothing is capable to open exactly in it and the fear is "superficial" and concerns only real in whole. Shestov and Heidegger's conversations always proceeded in the debatable course. Later Shestov told about one of such meetings to G. Lovtskiy: "... it would be good to read to you, as he (**M.Heidegger** –author's comment) there as if carrying out what I predicted to him at our meeting, declares that " the logic is dissolved in the whirlpool of initial inquiring, and that the power of logic comes to its end in philosophy that along with conceiving denial and deeper there is a firmness of counteraction ..." ¹. It is also possible to suggest that communication with L.Shestov pushed the German philosopher to special comprehension of the concept "nothing" in his work "What is metaphysics? ", a fortiori it was just that period in Heidegger's life when he set free "nothing" language. And perhaps it was Shestov who cast an image of Ivan Ilyich by Tolstoi who appears on pages of " Existence and Time" ². Anyway, but R.Bespalova indirectly points to it in her letter to L.Shestov: "The more I concern with Kierkegaard, the more I ask myself: what remains for Heidegger if subtract everything he is obliged to Kierkegaard and Husserl. Its asset is sharply narrowed, there are only subjects Welt (world) and Welter des Welt (the world worlds) and its magnificent technique. I admit you are right here as well" ³.

As we can see nowadays, the twenty-year period of L.Shestov's life in emigration was rather fruitful. Although initially his works weren't known to the European reader, he didn't become adapted to European philosophical and literary standards of that time. He always tried to be himself.

¹ Баранова-Шестова Н. Жизнь Льва Шестова. По переписке и воспоминаниям современников: в 2-х томах. – Париж: La Press Libre, 1983. – т. 2. – с. 21 – 22

² Heidegger M. Seit und Zeit. – Tübingen, M. Niemeyer, 1963. – s. 254

³ Баранова-Шестова Н. Жизнь Льва Шестова. По переписке и воспоминаниям современников: в 2-х томах. – т. 2. – с. 120

Publications of the first works in French were accepted rather critically, but brought undoubted recognition of Shestov talent, originality of philosophical approach. Over time Lev Shestov's works were estimated at their true worth by the European philosophical community. His ideas were involved into the development of philosophical process of the XX century. And it occurred not only during the thinker's lifetime, but after his death either. Today L.Shestov's philosophical works are published in many countries of Europe continuing to influence the development of the Person's inquisitive mind.

He was such a person, the philosophizing anti-philosopher sincerely believing out of faiths, the constant wanderer and always lonely, Russian Jewish inhabitant of Kiev – Lev SHESTOV (Judah Leyb Schwarzmann).

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